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ABSTRACT

While the demand for a highly skilled workforce has increased, several reports have highlighted the poor performance of high school students in reading, math, and science. Moreover, the achievement gap between white and minority students is widening. Latino students have one of the highest dropout rates and they perform less well than their peers on several indices of academic achievement. Moreover, the Latino population is growing rapidly. Factors that influence the achievement of Latino students at the high school level, and over which policymakers have some control, are type of school, quality of teaching, teacher expectations, and English language proficiency. Several interventions hold promise for increasing learning opportunities for Hispanic students. A program that focuses on literacy development across the curriculum is described. Special in-service awareness sessions that include all members of the school community and focus on the needs and characteristics of secondary Latino students have had success in increasing Latino high school completion and college attendance rates. A high school on the Mexico-California border uses teaching strategies that reinforce students' strengths, affirm cultural background, and emphasize native language development. A program developed by the Intercultural Development Research Association that uses cross-age tutoring, role modeling, and student recognition is based on valuing at-risk students and sustaining their efforts with effective coordinated strategies. (TD)

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LATINO STUDENTS AND SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION[1]

Julia Lara and Gitanjali Pande

Several trends have raised the public's concern regarding the quality of education at the secondary school level. Foremost is the recognition that the economic well being of the nation is threatened by an undereducated workforce. Recent reports indicate that most of today's high school students are ill prepared for the challenges that await them in postsecondary institutions or the workplace. While American high school students have made gains on national and international tests over the last decade; they are not sufficient to meet the requirements of tomorrow's economy.[2] Changes in the workplace have resulted in increased demand for highly skilled labor and decreased demand for unskilled labor. For students to succeed in this competitive economic environment, they must have strong oral and written communication skills and a mastery of mathematics. In addition, they must have problem solving skills and be able to adapt to rapidly developing technology.

While the demand for a highly skilled work force has increased, several reports have highlighted the poor performance of high school students on several indicators of academic achievement. Education Trust reported that today's American 17 year-olds are making less progress in reading, math, and science during their high school years than did their earlier counterparts and 30% of high school graduates who entered college needed to take a remedial course in basic subjects like English and mathematics.

Moreover, the achievement gap between white and minority students is widening. Data from the U.S. Department of Education indicate that African American and Latino 17 year olds have reading and math skills equal to eighth grade white students.[3] African American and Latino students are also much more likely to drop out of school. In 1998, the dropout rate for white students was eight percent, 14 percent for African American students, and 30 percent for Latino students.[4]

This article will focus on the academic status of Latino students at the high school level. In recent weeks several major newspaper articles have been reporting the results of the Census 2000 count.

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[1] The terms Hispanic and Latino will be used interchangeably in this article.

[2] American Youth Policy Forum. *High Schools of the Millennium.* Report of the Workgroup. August 2000.
Education Trust. *Youth at the Crossroads: Facing High School and Beyond.* 2000.

[3] Education Trust. 2000.

[4] National Center for Education Statistics. Digest of Education Statistics. 1999. Washington, DC: US Department of Education.

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Of particular interest is the attention given to the growth of the Latino population.[5] Between 1990 and 2000, the Latino population grew by 58 percent and now equals that of blacks, each comprising about 13 percent of the total population. Latinos in grades 9-12 constitute 13% of the school population and by 2030 they are expected to comprise 23% of the population.[6] The implication of the Latino student growth is more clearly evident in large urban school districts where most Latino students are concentrated. For example, Hispanic students represent 31% of all students enrolled in the Council of Great City Schools member districts. These are the districts with the highest student enrollment in the nation.

Not only do Latino students have one of the highest dropout rates, but they perform less well than their peers on several indices of academic achievement. For example, on the 1998 NAEP reading test only 24% of Latino 17 year olds scored at the "proficient" level versus 40% of white students. In mathematics, six percent of Latino students scored at the proficient level, while 18% of white adolescents scored at this level. In addition, Latino students are underrepresented on AP exams and tend to score lower than their white and Asian peers. These demographic shifts and performance indicators mean that the future work force will be more diverse and increasingly comprised of the very students that are now disproportionately enrolled in under performing schools.

[5] People of Hispanic origin can be of any race. In addition, they comprised of a diverse group of people originating from the various countries in Latin America, the Caribbean and US born people of Hispanic descent.

[6] ERIC Digest. February 2001

Factors that Influence the Achievement of Latino Students at the High School Level

Several factors influence the performance of Latino students at both the elementary and secondary school level including poverty status, English language proficiency, type of school attended, and racial/ethnic bias as reflected in interactions with the broader school community.[7] Of particular importance to educators and policymakers, are those factors over which they have some level of influence or control. These are summarized below.

Type of School and Quality of Teaching

Hispanic students are concentrated in resource poor schools characterized by high mobility rates, high turnover in teaching staff, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate instructional resources particularly for those students who are also limited English proficient. The quality of teaching has been found to have a direct effect on the academic achievement of students. Latino students enrolled in low performing resource poor schools are often taught by teachers who lack deep knowledge of content and are not prepared to teach students in the process of acquiring English. Various reports have indicated that in schools with large concentrations of poor students, teachers are either inexperienced to work with students with multiple needs or have not kept up with new developments in instructional pedagogy. In addition, mainstream teachers lack understanding of second language development. In 1994, the National Educational Goals Panel found that while 43% of secondary school teachers had limited English proficient (LEP) students in their classrooms, only about half of them received a training on how to teach second language learners (Rong & Prissle, 1998).

In addition, the issue of teacher expectations cannot be underestimated. Researchers have noted that the belief that minority students are less capable of meeting rigorous academic standards influences the type of course work students are given. For example, Hispanic students are often tracked into general courses of study that satisfy only the basic requirements and do not provide a path to four-year college or a rigorous technical school (Creating the Will, 2000). Unfortunately, students internalize this belief and often perform below their capacity. This problem has been observed among both low social economic status (SES) and high SES students.

English Language Proficiency

Most Latino students are not limited English proficient, however, the overwhelming majority of limited English proficient students are Latinos (75%). There are significant numbers of these students who come to school at the middle or high school level and are in need of

[7] This section of the article summarizes selected findings from two reports: ***Reaching the Top: A Report of the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement.*** (1999). New York, New York: The College Board. ***Creating the Will: Hispanic Achieving Educational Excellence.*** (2000). Washington, DC: President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans.

specialized second language development support in the form of English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual education. Most are served through ESL programs and sheltered content instruction in which the strategy for delivering content is modified to make the content more accessible to second language learners. Unfortunately, because native language instruction is not generally provided at the secondary school level, Latino students who are LEP face a difficult challenge in meeting content class expectations and learning English. This is a particularly daunting task for those students with limited schooling in their home language. Several school systems have developed biliteracy programs, which maintain the native language by using it as a means of teaching content while continuing English language instruction.

Interventions that Hold Promise for Increasing Learning Opportunities for Hispanic Students

The research literature on the education of Latino students in secondary schools has identified several common features of best practices that promote the academic success of these students including:

A focus on literacy development across the curriculum.

Profile Approach to Writing (PAW) professional development in creative writing to students from grades 3 to 12 (Fashola et al, 1997).[5] The program emphasizes a process of drafting and revision of compositions, and makes use of a writing profile to assess and guide student writing performance. The profile is a holistic, analytic scale that assesses content, organization, vocabulary use, language use, and mechanics in students' compositions. PAW was not developed for use with Latino students, but has been extensively used and evaluated in schools with many Latino students.

Special in-service awareness sessions that include all members of the school community and focus on the needs and characteristics of secondary Latino students

Communities in Schools Program (CIS) of San Antonio was designed to improve academic success at the high school level and ensure participants enroll and successfully complete postsecondary education. It is a school-based, year-round program providing immediately accessible services to young people and their families facing obstacles to personal or academic success. CIS professionals address students' real-life needs, which, if gone unmet, can often result in students dropping out of school. The program provides enrichment activities, tutoring, counseling, guidance and Saturday classes. CIS-SA provides health and human services referrals, promotes parent and family involvement in the educational process, career awareness, and pre-employment services. Activities address a whole range of issues - character education, poor attendance, academic deficiencies, crisis situations, gang involvement, health issues, and teen pregnancy. An evaluation report reveals an average annual high school graduation rate of 98%, of which 90% attend college with many receiving financial aid and scholarships. CIS is currently serving 5,000 students and their families in 35 schools, in eight school districts. It also runs pre-college programs in six high schools, serving low-income, first generation college candidates; it has two alternative non-traditional high school academies serving students who might otherwise drop out of school.

Use of teaching strategies that reinforce students' strengths and affirm cultural background

For example, he Calexico High School in Calexio, California, on the southern border of the U.S., has 98% Latino students and 80% ELLs. It operates on a philosophy based on such principles as respect for the students' culture, language and background; a strong belief that all students can learn; and equal opportunities for all students to pursue further education. They have eliminated the tracking system and have high expectations of all students.

Practices underlying the academic success of the school's students are: an efficient system of counseling both within the school system and in coordination with outside agencies, and teaching English but also emphasizing that native language development is essential. Because there is support for continuous development of student's academic skills required courses are taught in Spanish, English, and through sheltered English instruction (Walqui, 2000).

[5] Fashola, Olatokunbo., Slavin, Robert. Promising *Programs for Elementary and Middle Schools: Evidence of Effectiveness and Replicability*. Journal of Education for Students at Risk, 2 (3), 251-307

Extended learning opportunities that provide students with extra time to catch up in learning and content matter and in English language development

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, created by the Intercultural Development Research Association, is an internationally- recognized dropout prevention program in schools across the U.S., Puerto Rico, Great Britain and Brazil. Since starting in 1984 in San Antonio, this cross-age tutoring program has kept more than 5,500 students in school, young people who were previously at risk of dropping out. All students are valued and none are expendable - this philosophy gives strength to the program's instructional strategies (classes are student tutors, tutoring sessions, field trips, role modeling, and student recognition) and to its support strategies (curriculum, coordination, staff enrichment, parent involvement and program evaluation. The key to the program's success is in valuing students who are considered at risk of dropping out of school and sustaining their efforts with effective, coordinated strategies. This program, over the course of 15 years, has made a visible difference to lives of over 74,500 families, children and educators.